

Bureau of HIV and STD Prevention Memorandum

To: TDH Contractors Implementing SISTA

From: Field Operations

Date: 07/28/04

Subject: Timing of Sessions

Several organizations have requested to adapt the SISTA intervention by combining sessions. Retention has proven the major catalyst. As programs seek to increase the number of participants completing the intervention, many find it difficult to maintain group member attendance over the five-week period required to complete one cycle of the intervention.

To better understand the significance of the time between sessions and any limitations or leeway in this area, TDH contacted the national technical assistance contractor for the intervention, Marilyn A. Moering, the executive director of Building Bridges, Inc., in Jackson, Mississippi.

A couple of scenarios were put before the technical assistance contractor:

- 1. Organization A would implement one session per day, completing all five sessions in one week, in a Mon–Tue–Wed–Thru–Fri format.
- 2. Organization B would implement two sessions per week, e.g. on a Mon-Wed plan, completing all five sessions in about two and a half weeks.

Marilyn Moering's response:

Because of the content, the distance between sessions does make difference with outcomes. I have spoken with Dr. Wingood about this in the past. If you're doing sessions everyday, then you're not doing SISTA. There is no time to rationalize what they've learned, or not time to digest the information. They're just spitting back what you said. You'd be teaching the skills, but learning to be assertive takes time, and if you leave time, things will happen that will allow them to use it. [the biggest concern is] between sessions 3-4, and between sessions 4-5. A day between the first three sessions would be good, and then four to five full days between sessions 3-4 and 4-5 [would be sufficient length of time].

The timing of sessions is an important core element of group-level interventions. The SISTA intervention, as it is more an intervention about self-esteem, identity and assertiveness, underscores this necessity. As outlined above, there is some leeway on the timing of the first three sessions. If your agency wishes to implement some of the information listed above, please contact your field operations consultant, as all adaptations or other changes in implementation of an intervention must be approved in advance.